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Blagojevich, Governor

Illinois Department on Aging
Charles D. Johnson, Director

What every faith community needs to know about elder abuse

Break the Silence

Illinois Department on Aging

The bond between older adults and their communities of faith is a strong one. So it follows that this tie can be used to support the older adult in crisis. Members of the community of faith have long expressed respect for their elders with programs for the home-bound, transportation, meals and other social supports. Prevention of elder abuse should be included on this list of commitments. Be alert to signs of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation… the elders in your community need you.

What is elder abuse?

There are many types of elder abuse…

- **Physical Abuse** means inflicting physical pain or injury upon an older adult.
- **Sexual Abuse** means touching, fondling, intercourse or any other sexual activity with an older adult when the older adult is unable to understand, unwilling to consent, threatened or physically forced.
- **Emotional Abuse** means verbal assaults, threats of abuse, harassment or intimidation.
- **Confinement** means restraining or isolating an older adult, other than for medical reasons.
- **Passive neglect** means the caregiver's failure to provide an older adult with life's necessities, including, but not limited to, food, clothing, shelter or medical care.
- **Willful deprivation** means willfully denying an older adult medication, medical care, shelter, food, a therapeutic device or other physical assistance and thereby exposing that person to the risk of physical, mental or emotional harm – except when the older adult has expressed an intent to forego such care.
- **Financial Exploitation** means the misuse or withholding of an older adult's resources by another, to the disadvantage of the older adult or the profit or advantage of someone else.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who are the abusers?

The majority of abusers are family members. Other abusers include caregivers (paid and volunteer), "friends," neighbors, fiduciaries, bankers, lawyers and others.

Who are the abused?

Men and women of all ethnic backgrounds and social status can be victimized by elder abuse. Social isolation and mental impairment (such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease) are two factors that may make an older adult more vulnerable to abuse.

If I report my suspicions of abuse, will I harm my relationship with the older adult who is part of my faith community?

Even if you think the older adult or the abuser will know it was you who made the report, consider that those who are abused often tell someone about the abuse because they know they need help. If you do not report the abuse, you are sending a message to the older adult that what is happening to them is not serious.

I am worried that a member of my faith community is at risk of abuse, but nothing has happened yet. Is there anything I can do to help prevent the abuse?

Preventing abuse before it begins is always the preferred course of action. Find some time to meet alone with the older adult and explain your concerns.

Let him or her know that you offer your support, should it ever be needed.

Break the Silence **Report Elder Abuse**

How can I help break the silence?

Intervene. Do not ignore the signs of elder abuse. Break the silence!
If you suspect that someone in your community of faith is a victim of abuse, neglect or financial exploitation, call:

Illinois Department on Aging
Elder Abuse Hotline:
1-866-800-1409
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

Elder Abuse and Neglect Program services are available through local provider agencies. Reports may also be made directly to the local elder abuse provider agency where the older adult lives.

To find a local provider agency, visit:
www.state.il.us/aging/1directory/elder_abuse.pdf.

All reports are kept confidential, and anonymous reports are accepted.

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Illinois Department on Aging
421 East Capitol Ave., #100
Springfield, Illinois 62701-1789

Senior HelpLine: 1-800-252-8966
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

Download this brochure at **www.state.il.us/aging** in the "News and Publications" section.

The Illinois Department on Aging does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in compliance with appropriate State and Federal statutes. If you feel you have been discriminated against, call the Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966, 1-888-206-1327 (TTY).

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